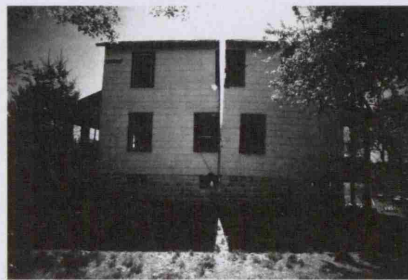


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Splitting and Red House: Two Homes Set Apart

MSc Architectural History
The Bartlett School of Architecture
University College London

Master Report
September 2006

By Tordis Berstrand

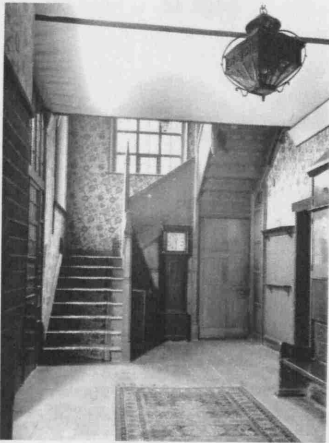
Supervised by Dr. Jane Rendell

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_01 The entrance hall, Red House, 1944



_02 The entrance hall, Red House, 2004



_03 View of Splitting, 1974

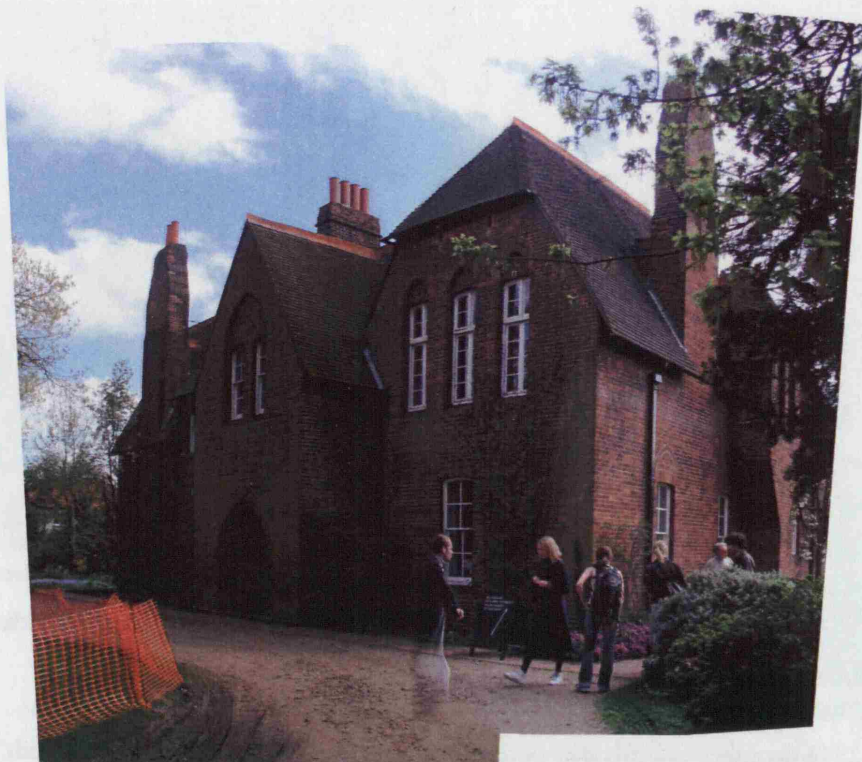
Two photographs of the entrance hall in William Morris' Red House, built in Bexleyheath south of London in 1859, make me think of Gordon Matta-Clark's building cuts.

The Red House images appear next to each other in a text, I am reading, one taken in 1944 the other in 2004, they both show the same space, the entrance hall with the staircase, yet, they are not identical. Slight differences occur in the furnishings and on the walls, one photograph is almost a frontal view, the other is slightly angled.

They both show a space devoid of inhabitants, quiet and orderly. Two spaces then, and yet, actually the same. Just not framed as one, *here*, on paper, but always contained within the same walls, *there*, in Bexleyheath. Seeing the images, I am in two places, which is actually one, simultaneously. I am split between the images, they split the Red House, and so invoke a feeling of unease.

They still do. The staging of the home, which occurs in both photographs, is silent; it presents a perfect still life, an untouchable setting, a home ideal. It is a staging of the home *as* an image, even if it was not staged *for* the image. Yet, the objects on display, furniture and architectural features, somehow wrestle with the format, as if unsettled despite the determined framing. The camera's attempt to force its perspectival view somehow fails and it unwillingly captures an underlying tension in the entrance hall, if not a home alive.

Matta-Clark's building cuts live on in photographic documentation, film works, and collages as the buildings have all gone. His preference for assembling several images to 'build' one representational work, as if one framing could not express the event, is apparent. The cuts revealed movement and the representations had to incorporate that dynamism, to take the viewer on a journey rather than provide one fixed point of view.



_04 Red House, exterior montage, 2006

Now a National Trust museum, the house that William Morris built has become a testament to his activities and ideas. Others went on to live in the house after him, but as they have now gone it is again his home, which is on display.

A place today caught up by the growth of London, it is where he first set out to create a remote haven for his family and friends. Near a railway station the house would not be more detached from the city than it was possible to return without difficulty, or to get to the house in the first place. At the same time, the location allowed Morris a feeling of leaving the atrocities of the world behind to create his own *Palace of Art*, while keeping up his businesses in London.¹

It was his first home of own choice and taste, conceived with the architect friend Philip Webb, and highly inspired by medievalism as interpreted by the hero John Ruskin.² Morris dreamed of creating a home in the style of the thirteenth century and presumably chose the location in Bexleyheath due to it being on the route of Canterbury's pilgrims.³ In accordance with Ruskin's prescriptions the house was built complete with porch and an all-embracing roof scape,⁴ and in line with nineteenth century historicism slightly eclectic although the style of the Gothic Revival, current at the time, was predominant.⁵

William Morris and Philip Webb had their references in place when they set out to create a building for the future inspired by the past. The house was not built on a fixed scheme more than adaptability to change was a preference. This was particularly striking in relation to the well court, which was partially enclosed by the L-shaped form of the house, inviting the extension to the building, which was eventually planned for in 1864. The idea was to unite the families of Morris and his artist friend Edward Burne-Jones on the premises; two homes in one coherent building surrounding the well court like an Oxford college or medieval monastery. Despite Webb's drawings of the new complex, the extension was never built and the Red House remained a half house. A split house maybe even, as the decision not to go through with the plan was not

¹ "The Palace of Art" was a poem by Alfred Tennyson published in 1832, which Morris seems to refer to in letters, when describing the Red House. His comments reveal "that he and Edward Burne-Jones once invested some hope in the viability of this castle in the air," according to Marcus Waithe in "The Stranger at the Gate: Privacy, Property, and the Structures of Welcome at William Morris's Red House," *Victorian Studies*, vol. 46 no. 4 (2004) p. 570.

² John Ruskin's work *The Stones of Venice* was published in 1853 and the chapter "The Nature of Gothic" was very influential on William Morris and Philip Webb, who both acquired a copy prior to designing the Red House. What in particular came to inform their thinking was Ruskin's dichotomy between the middle ages and the nineteenth century, the worker as a free artist against the division of labour in the industrialised production. See Mark Swenarton, *Artisans and Architects: the Ruskinian Tradition in Architectural Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1989) p. 52-60, 70-6.

³ J. W. Mackail makes this note in *The Life of William Morris*, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green & Company, 1899) p. 141.

⁴ P. Blundell-Jones refers to John Ruskin's lectures given in Edinburgh in 1853 and published in *Lectures on Architecture and Painting* in 1854, when he concludes, "[the] house that emerges in the course of the first lecture could be Webb's. It must have a conspicuous roof which is its 'very soul'... 'wherein consists its shelter.' In this 'its whole heart and hospitality are concentrated.' It must also have a generous 'pure old Gothic porch, walled in on both sides, with its pointed arch entrance and gable roof above [and]... a stone seat on each side of it,'" in P. Blundell Jones, "Masters of Building – The Red House," *Architects Journal*, vol. 183 no. 3 (Jan 15 1986) pp. 38-9.

⁵ Blundell Jones traces Webb's preference for the Gothic Revival the direct way to G. E. Street, whom Webb worked for eight years. Street and William Butterfield were the prime Gothic Revivalists of the time, and the latter was admired by Webb, p. 39. Yet, as Andrew Saint has pointed out "Red House is not really Gothic, though it emerges out of a line of middling-sized houses by the Goths Webb most admired – Pugin, Street and Butterfield. Most of these houses boast spreading plans, high roofs, tall chimneys and fenestration wilfully dotted around. But they also have the sash windows and matter-of-fact proportions of the plainer Georgians," in A. Saint, "I Had to Refrain," *London Review of Books* (Dec 1 2005) p. 30.

easy and without consequences. Morris was faced with a difficult choice and eventually left the house in 1865. The split was definitive.⁶

So the perfect house, and home, was split and abandoned five years after it was built. Was it just due to the uncompleted extension or was there something Morris and Webb forgot to take into account, when they conceived the house? Something deliberately left out, or something the house could not negotiate with its location in time and place, when at the same time conforming to their ideals and inspirations? Could there be something repressed, a house unconscious, blurring the clarity of the home project?

“Marked by its origins in romantic thought, the theme of the uncanny serves to join architectural speculation on the peculiarly unstable nature of “house and home” to a more general reflection on the questions of social and individual estrangement, alienation, exile, and homelessness.”

– Anthony Vidler⁷

Taking off from the uncanniness I experienced when confronted with the two photographs of the entrance hall, their doubling of that same space and the unsettlement of the photographic framing, this report sets out to explore the Red House and its ambiguous mediation between home and house, retreat and reality, Bexleyheath and London.

In his seminal essay “The Uncanny” (“Das Unheimliche”) from 1919,⁸ Freud elaborates the paradoxical relation between the supposedly opposite terms, *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, translated into homely and unhomely. He shows how the latter etymologically grows out of the former, which in turn carries a reference to what is “concealed and kept out of sight”⁹ and thereby shares connotations with the notion of the unhomely. The two terms intertwine, suggesting the constitution of the home as potentially centred around something hidden, a constitutive secret, which could be revealed in an unsettling way.

Freud quotes F. W. J. Schelling’s interpretation: “‘Unheimlich’ is the name for everything that ought to have remained... secret and hidden but has come to light,”¹⁰ and in a sense this quote restores the progressive meaning of the words without disturbing the notion of the connotative intersection, that the homely is also unhomely. Out of the home grows the unhomely, it is embedded in the concept of home and as such inescapable unless it remains secret and hidden.¹¹

⁶ The collection at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London contains Webb’s drawings for the extension, both the first suggestion and the subsequently reduced scheme, which was made to cheapen the project. The initial proposal extends the existing building with an east wing enclosing the well court further and appear as a very promising plan to unite the two families under the same roof and yet keep their homes separate.

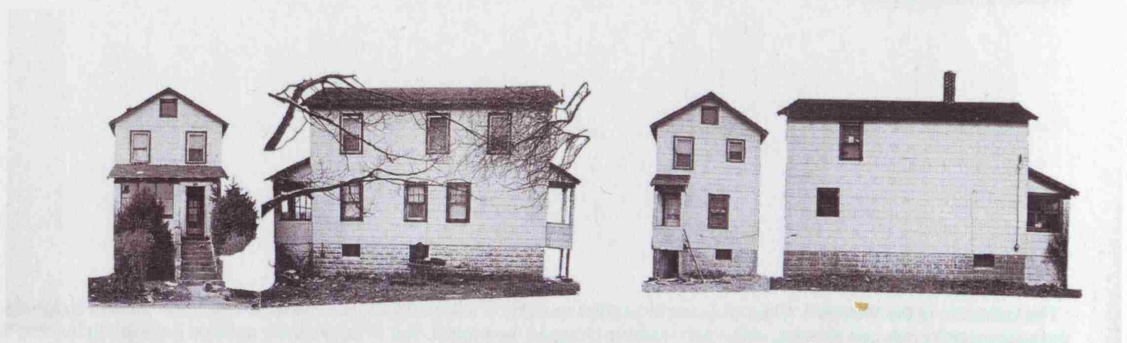
⁷ Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 1992) p. ix.

⁸ Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” *Art and Literature*, The Pelican Freud Library, vol. 14 (London: Penguin, 2003) pp. 339-76.

⁹ Freud, p. 345.

¹⁰ Daniel Sanders, *Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache* (Leipzig: Otto Wigand, 1860), according to Vidler the quote is extracted by Sanders from F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Mythologie*, 2 vols. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966), Vidler, p. 26.

¹¹ “Indeed the entire argument of “The Uncanny” was to devolve around this apparently simple statement [the Schelling quote], finally only understandable, according to Freud, by the concept of repression,” Vidler, p. 26.



_05 322 Humphrey Street facades, from the *Splitting* book, 1974

If the theme of the uncanny prompts an investigation into the Red House, it takes off from the notion of the house being essentially a home and therefore, following the logic, necessarily also unhomely. What is then this unhomely in the case of the Red House and did it to some extent surface in the physical fabric of the house?

That the Red House has been praised as a precursor for the modern house by the likes of Hermann Muthesius and Nikolaus Pevsner ties together the connection between the unhomely and modernity as a speculation the Red House encompasses.¹² Vidler's interpretation of the architectural uncanny as a "modern unhomely" reflects the lost ability to dwell in modern society, how the process of modernization has brought about a condition of intellectual and actual homelessness, and how architecture reflects this dilemma in every attempt to shelter human activities.¹³ How to design and build houses, homes, in an era, which renders dwelling impossible?

If the Red House is a proto-modern house, and maybe even home, it might bring forth qualities, which can inspire the domestic architecture of the twentieth century to allow us to dwell again, what are then these qualities? That the house eventually was given up by Morris suggests an unhomely agent, something not settled in the house, or what made him leave? Could there be a degree of unsettlement on a larger scale in the relation between the home, its house, and the context, historically and socially? After all, Morris did not only leave the house but also the place, Bexleyheath, to go back to London. Was the domestic retreat, physically and psychologically, built on the fringes of a society in transformation rather than fully anchored and centred in the Bexleyheath soil? Did Morris become homeless? Was he modern, or was the house, and what did modern mean, for him?

"In a mimetic process, the facts of a social condition are presented in an 'expressive' way, not reduced to mere calculations. In a mimetic manipulation, something is shown that normally remains hidden; hence this process contains a moment critical of what is accepted as normal. The autonomous moment of architecture is also based on mimesis, in its 'expressive' way of giving shape to space."

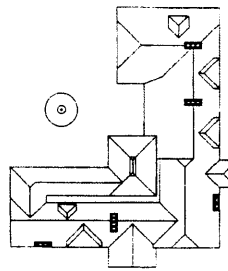
– Hilde Heynen ¹⁴

When American architect/artist Gordon Matta-Clark cut through and split an abandoned building in 1974, he did not only force a house, but a former home, to negotiate the unhomely.

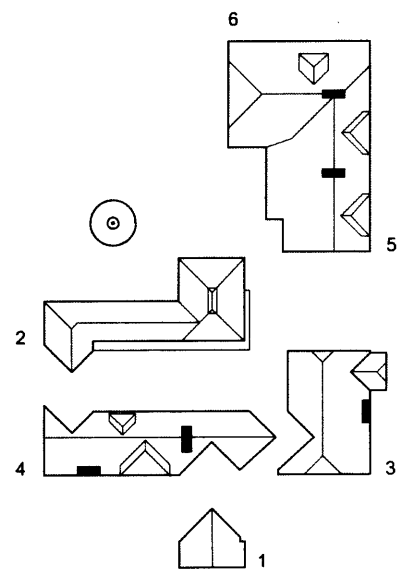
¹² In *The English House* (London: Crosby Lockwood Staples, 1979) p.17, Hermann Muthesius describes the Red House as "the first private house of the new artistic culture, the first house to be conceived as a unified whole inside and out, the very first example in the history of the modern house." Nikolaus Pevsner adds, "[t]he house was daring in many ways, in exposing its red brick without a coat of stucco, in planning from inside out, that is, with secondary consideration of façades, and in frankly showing the construction inside," *The Sources of Modern Architecture and Design* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968) p. 21.

¹³ "As a concept, then, the uncanny has, not unnaturally, found its metaphorical home in architecture: first in the house, haunted or not, that pretends to afford the utmost security while opening itself to the secret intrusion of terror, and then in the city, where what was once walled and intimate, the confirmation of community [...] has been rendered strange by the spatial incursions of modernity," in Vidler, p. 11.

¹⁴ Hilde Heynen, "Architecture between Modernity and Dwelling: Reflections on Adorno's 'Aesthetic Theory'," *Assemblage*, no. 17 (April 1992) p. 86.



_06 Red House, roof plan



_07 Red House, taken apart in five (six) volumes

His gesture allowed light to enter an otherwise dark and half empty building, which was scheduled for demolition as the area of Englewood, New Jersey, where it was located, was set for regeneration. It was a house by all means doomed and just before it disappeared, one final operation would turn it into a performance of promise.

What Matta-Clark's cutting established was a provocative negotiation between interior and exterior taking the one beyond commonplace, and not least architectural, illusions about the other. By cleaving a building, a home, he not only brought "light and air into spaces that never had enough of either,"¹⁵ he altered the viewer's perception, as well as understanding, of the home as contained in a house. The potentially uncanny undercurrents, which might have lurked in the dark interior, were compelled to respond once this sudden interaction with the house took place. It seems the radicalism of Matta-Clark's gesture could almost set them checkmate, by introducing an element of the unhomely, a cut, into the physical fabric of the house.¹⁶

Following Matta-Clark's model, I will take the Red House apart to explore what it might be concealing in order to safeguard its status as a particularly refined house and home. As the house resists being split into two halves, due to its volumetric structure, I will instead dismantle the building along the lines of its assembled parts, the cleavage lines already there. The psychoanalyst, James S. Grotstein, suggests the splitting of a personality, like a crystal, is predetermined: when it splits, it is fragmented along the lines of its structure.¹⁷

Six volumes derive from such a 'splitting' of Red House, and through the five chapters of this report they will be explored through the lens of Matta-Clark and his film version of *Splitting*. Following the narrative of the film, the report is divided into five successive chapters: Entering, Splitting, And doubling, Split definitive, and Abandoned. Each chapter is introduced by the sentence, introducing the sections of the film, and throughout the report my own short interludes will capture significant movements of the text and lead on to new perspectives.

By an entrance, almost approachable, a movement forwards, up a few stairs, stops. Not even close, or closed, just in a sense suspended, marked by a warning – "do not occupy" – the doorway leans back, disappears into the darkness of the house it fronts...

¹⁵ "Oh, I see the purpose for that hole – it is an experiment in bringing light and air into spaces that never had enough of either," Gordon Matta-Clark explains that his "best (wo)man-in-the-street reaction" came from a 70-year-old concierge, when he was working in Paris a few years after *Splitting*. Donald Wall, "Gordon Matta-Clark's Building Dissections," in Corinne Diserens (ed), *Gordon Matta-Clark* (London: Phaidon, 2003) p. 182, reprinted from *Arts Magazine* (May 1976) pp. 74-76.

¹⁶ In all its literalness, Matta-Clark's *Splitting* is a work, which responds to T. W. Adorno's theory about modernity. Heynen explains how Adorno conceives modernity as "constituted by contradictory moments" and because of these "privileges the principle of negativity: if every positively formulated objective has an inherent moment in which the pursued object turns into its contradiction – liberation into repression, enlightenment into myth – then it is preferable to put one's trust in the negative," in "Architecture between Modernity and Dwelling: Reflections on Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*," p. 86. Architecture's dilemma within this framework is obvious as a positive, constructive discipline, nevertheless it has to gain a critical stance to reflect modernity and Matta-Clark's project addresses this issue.

¹⁷ "If we throw a crystal to the floor, it breaks; but not into haphazard pieces. It comes apart along its lines of cleavage into fragments whose boundaries, though they were invisible, were predetermined by the crystal's structure. Mental patients are split and broken structures of this same kind," in James S. Grotstein, *Splitting and Projective Identification* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1985) p. 58-9.



_08 322 Humphrey Street, entrance facade



_09 Red House, entrance porch

First of the two projects done in 1973, *Splitting* uses a typical one-family house in Englewood, N.J., a New York City bedroom suburb.

Gordon Matta-Clark wanted to work with a house, a home. His gallerist Holly Solomon happened to have one, bought due to the value of the lot rather than the usefulness of the building on it, which was going to be demolished soon anyway. Work could begin...¹⁸

He brought a film camera to the site to capture the action, thereby being able to reconstruct and edit the incident afterwards. Or he could have done so, but it seems he chose otherwise as the film begins from one end – of the building, and the event – looking for a way to enter.

There it is, the place to sit, and wait, or look, and think, or do, whatever is necessary before leaving again. Should I leave a trace, or just the wet shoes, play a game, or simply pass through? To the inside of the house or the outside, from where I came – two ways to go and one place to stay.

A porch, leading to a front door, it signifies hospitality, reaches out, invites, and shelters. It mediates between the exterior and the interior of a building providing a space for passers-by to rest, a public space on the doorstep to a private interior. One has to trespass the property in order to reach the porch, a circumstance that enforces the symbolic character and, in a sense, reduces the impact – one must know where to find it, that it exists.

If it was a standard feature of every house to have a porch, it would be a different thing altogether, then maybe even the Red House porch would still be busy. Was it busy when Morris lived here? And why did he build it? Did he leave the front door, situated in the deep end of the porch, open, or would he leave visitors to rest on the wooden benches along its sides without noticing if anybody was there? Was he waiting for someone to come?

Building a porch is a promise of potential entrance to the house it fronts, and Morris gave a double promise as he installed a second porch in the garden façade of Red House and called it *The Pilgrim's Rest*. Further more, he situated a well in close proximity to the porch, a notable feature with a certain indefinability about it. Is it a resting place (it has seats)? Is it a monument (for the pilgrim's walk)? Or is it there simply to walk around (to suggest the quadrangle not yet in place)? It might all have been part of a larger plan, a plan to found a home on the grounds of severe hospitality. As such a dream about a better life, a social life, with concern for *the other*.

¹⁸ Holly Solomon remembers the voice on the telephone: "Holly, I need a house," Thomas Crow, "Gordon Matta-Clark," in Diserens, p. 74.



_10 Red House, site map

Morris situated his bedroom right above the porch. A curious binding of the most public and the most private spaces of all. Was it a way not to get absolutely disconnected from the outside 'real' world? Not to loose oneself completely in his *Palace of Art*? It appears quite fearless, the way the porch shoots out from the rest of the building with the master bedroom on top. But maybe then Morris was not afraid of blending the private with the public, and again in a somewhat symbolic and controllable way, as the stranger most likely would pass the house unaware of its hospitality.

So the porch is there, but presumably no longer in use, it might not lead to the house at all. Now a museum we sneak in from behind, from the kitchen yard, an informal encounter with the interior, which appears rather welcoming despite the lack of architectural embrace. Walking through the corridor from the back door, one arrives in the entrance hall through a door below the staircase. It makes me wonder, if someone is resting in the porch...

"Let us say yes to *who or what turns up*, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any *identification*, whether or not is has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female."

- Jacques Derrida ¹⁹

What defines a house, a home in a concrete sense is its boundaries, the distinctions between inside and outside, which might not rely on a clear-cut difference between one side of a wall and the other. The passage from a street to a house is often obstructed by several zones to surpass, a gradual increase in the awareness of being on private property.

In the case of the Red House a first halt is that of the wall, which encloses the property and act as a symbolic fortification, then follows the curved path to the house with its risks of being seen from one of the windows, then eventually the porch, and finally the grand door to the house itself. The purpose of entering is tested in various ways, but there is no evidence that Morris intended to enforce control of people and their purposes. Rather it seems as if the gradual withdrawal from the bustling city life had to be staged, had to have its moments rather than being one continuous and eventless distance between one and the other.

Nevertheless, the way the Red House is set apart from its surroundings veils a conflict. What on a local scale appears to be a well thought out withdrawal is simultaneously on a larger scale a careful arrangement of staying in touch. A double retreat then, escaping the home or fleeing the city, but maybe also a double pursuit. A remote household might have appealed to the young and idealistic, if not romantic, Morris and proved easier to stage and inspire than society as such. Since aspirations outside the territory of the private home were on the agenda as well, Morris had to settle his ambitions somehow in between.

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000) p. 77.



_11 Gordon Matta-Clark splitting 322 Humphrey Street, 1974

If this ambivalence towards concepts of city and home was a precondition for the location of the Red House; it also informed the scheme for the house as such and was a dilemma throughout Morris' life there. If his vision of hospitality forced him to expect the stranger at his gate and thereby invite interaction between home and its surroundings by installing a porch, it was merely a symbolic act. So the porch stands somewhere in between, connecting the house with the world outside; Morris with the stranger; home with work. It is a portal between dream and reality, Morris' dream of a perfect social life founded in medieval inclusiveness and the reality of a society transgressing the limits of historicism.

The porch might just as well be interpreted as yet another distance, yet another separation, a filter. How to enter the house?²⁰

A ladder turns horizontal movement along an almost uniform plane into expectations of a vertical gesture, which will open, what is closed, and enclosed, and out of sight. But wait, first the whole thing, a house, just an image, to remember...

SPLITTING

Beginning at the centre of the house two parallel lines were cut through all the structural surfaces.

When light shines through, the other on the ground is cleaved too. The shadow of a house in the grass, and tools to cut it through as well, the Sawsall is lifted high. Lights golden pen draws a line that sets the home apart.

Gordon Matta-Clark is cutting, and cutting, and yet cutting some more off 322 Humphrey Street. He works meticulously while hanging suspended from the roof with the *Sawsall* chainsaw in his hand – he is attached, literally, to the house, the slow process of cutting allowing him to consider every movement.

“Why hang things on a wall when the wall itself is so much more a challenging medium?”²¹ Matta-Clark is asking questions but is also trying to counter for them, his is an approach of doing, or *undoing* as he puts it.²²

“I see the work as a special stage in perpetual metamorphosis, a model for people's constant action on space as much as in the space that surrounds them. Buildings are fixed entities

²⁰ The movements of entering, crossing a threshold, and inviting or receiving, have been elaborated by Jacques Derrida in a series of seminars published as the book *Of Hospitality*. Derrida reflects on the paradoxical nature of hospitality as both a promise and a distance. The “law of unconditional hospitality” versus “the laws,” the unspoken rights and duties affiliated with crossing the threshold to someone else's domain, are opposed but they also rely on each other in order to be valid. A hierarchy exists despite this mutual dependence, the former comes before the latter, A before B, but there would not be an alphabet if one of them were missing. Listing the candidates to be permitted unconditional hospitality, as Derrida goes on to do, serves to avoid those, who cannot be addressed through language, and thereby avoid the inclusion of the stranger about whom we cannot speak, or maybe even think. Morris' hospitality, and the layout of the house and site, articulates this antinomy through the symbolic installation of the porch.

²¹ Wall, p. 188.

²² “That Matta-Clark referred to his principle activity as ‘unbuilding’ points to the ways in which he was confronting the logic of artistic as well as architectural production. In contrast to an artistic ‘work’ he offered instead a kind of artistic *play* – an idea of art as practice or use,” in Pamela M. Lee, *Objects to be Destroyed* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000) p.xiii.

in the minds of most – the notion of mutable space is virtually taboo – even in one's own house. People live in their space with a temerity that is frightening. Homeowners generally do little more than maintain their property. It's baffling how rarely the people get involved in fundamentally changing their place by simply undoing it."²³

As Matta-Clark points out his work is a model and the method to pursue his idea is hands on. His is a direct physical encounter with the chosen building, he constructs by reversing the building process, builds by taking apart. In this sense the concept of building is expanded, the consequence of such a process is to claim that fragmentation not only creates more units but also enforces use and value, that it adds by dividing and subtracting material.

"I'm dealing with architectural structure as a reality. There's something about the house, which is very substantial, especially in terms of the environment in which it exists... it's like juggling with syntax, or disintegrating some established sequence of parts. In this particular case, the piece is a way of imposing a presence, an idea, it's a way to disorientation by using a clear and given system."²⁴

A presence, an idea, disorientation – several of Matta-Clark's projects are radical alterations of existing structures establishing a dialogue between subject and matter. In *Splitting* the intermediary presence of the cut offers a new way of reading the house, draws a new section. Matta-Clark is inscribing himself in the structure, when he cuts, and it is an inscription, which works according to different parameters than the more conventional builders' variety of fingerprints left on and in a building.²⁵ His handiwork follows the movements of his body across the existing building; the cut is a trace of his own presence, a drawing that could not have been presupposed on paper.

"A simple cut or series of cuts, act as a powerful drawing device able to redefine spatial situations and structural components. What is invisibly at play behind a wall or floor, once exposed, becomes an active participant in a spatial drawing of the building's inner life."²⁶

When Matta-Clark cuts something is exposed, which was otherwise hidden, something within the structure in a sense already built into the house, but inevitably also that, which was added through the years of occupancy. As he splits the house in two parts, cut it along its middle line, he symbolically targets the core of the structure, and reveals hidden motives and responses to time and use.

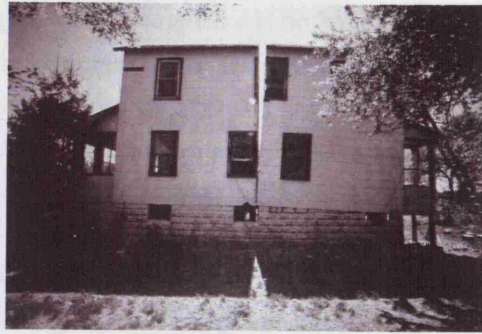
"I see in the formal aspect of past building works a constant concern with the centre of each structure. Even before the *Splitting*, *Bin.go.ne.* [*Bingo*] and *Pier 52* [*Day's End*] projects, which

²³ Wall, p. 185.

²⁴ Matta-Clark in "Gordon Matta-Clark: Splitting the Humphrey Street Building," an interview by Liza Bear in *Diserens*, p. 167, reprinted from *Avalanche* (Dec 1974) pp. 34-7.

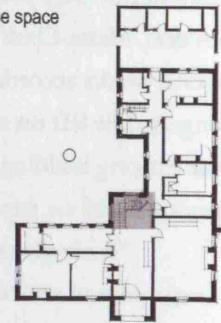
²⁵ Marianne Brouwer elaborates the issue of how Matta-Clark positions himself in his building cuts in "Laying Bare," *Gordon Matta-Clark* (IVAM Centre Julio Gonzales, 1993) p. 363. "Matta-Clark is not conceptualising architecture; on the contrary he is literally cutting across it, pitting his own body against architecture's, sometimes at the risk of his life, to undo the closed circuits of functionalism."

²⁶ Matta-Clark in "Interview with Gordon Matta-Clark, Antwerp, September 1977," in *Diserens*, p. 188, reprinted from the catalogue *Gordon Matta-Clark* (Internationaal Cultureel Centrum, Antwerp, 1977) pp. 187-90.

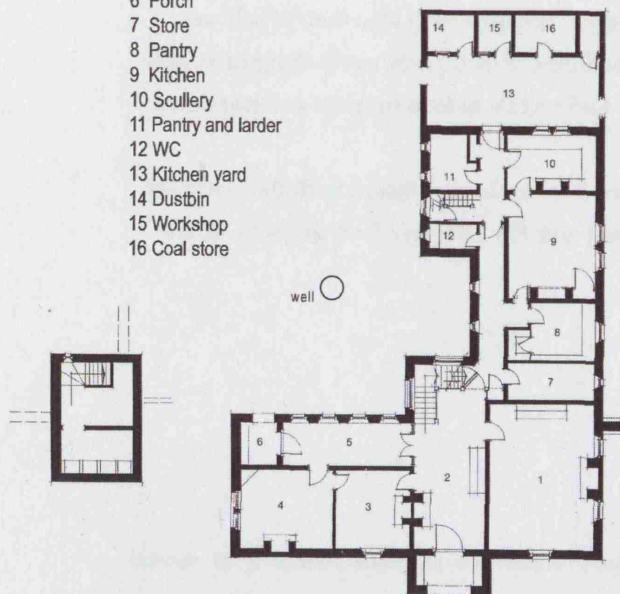


_12 The split house and its shadow

The staircase space

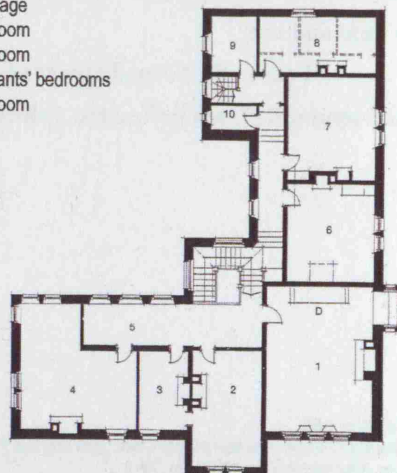


- 1 Dining room
- 2 Hall
- 3 Waiting room
- 4 Bedroom
- 5 Passage
- 6 Porch
- 7 Store
- 8 Pantry
- 9 Kitchen
- 10 Scullery
- 11 Pantry and larder
- 12 WC
- 13 Kitchen yard
- 14 Dustbin
- 15 Workshop
- 16 Coal store



_13 Red House, ground floor plan

- 1 Drawing room
- 2 Bedroom
- 3 Dressing room
- 4 Study
- 5 Passage
- 6 Bedroom
- 7 Bedroom
- 8 Servants' bedrooms
- 9 Bedroom
- 10 WC



_14 Red House, first floor plan

were direct exercises in centering and recentering, I would usually go to what I saw as the heart of the spatial-structural constant that could be called the Hermetic aspect of my work, because it relates to an inner-personal gesture, by which the microcosmic self is related to the whole.”²⁷

Matta-Clark enters the building through his own body. Through a mimetic gesture he identifies a point of intersection with the building, in this case the middle line, the supposed centre axis. It is not a surprising choice considering the box shape of the house and the mirroring effect of the façades, but it suggests the house being an abandoned home might affect his relation to it as well, in a psychological way.

By targeting the centre of the structure and cleaving the house in two he is addressing the home as a hiding place, a box of secrets, in a very direct way. And so, he cuts all the way through, moves around, jumps, hangs, and crawls. Eventually frames the whole house from the outside, cut through and illuminated by the sun, casting a cleaved shadow on the ground.

Dismantling, what was once assembled, to see if it really fits together, is simultaneously to reassemble, what was once taken apart, to trace why it could not be one. What came first, the dream, the plan for a house, or the differentiation of spaces to make it up?

The first volume, which comes off the Red House is the porch with Morris’ bedroom on top. The second is the staircase connected to the passage shooting east towards the garden porch. In between is a gap containing the entrance hall, a central gap.

Stepping deeper into the house is simultaneously stepping into light, as a high pitched roof opens up and two large windows illuminate the staircase. The roof interior with exposed beams and a ceiling painted with two repeated patterns, confines a significant space, which elevates the purpose of ascending to reach the first floor even higher. Underneath the hall is a small cellar, and with its pitched roof and anchoring cellar the staircase becomes not only where movement is distributed on horizontal levels but a vertical marker stretching out between the underground and the sky.

A staircase tower drawn at the back of one of the maps in Morris’ copy of *Murray’s Guide to France*, and presumably drawn by Webb, appears to be the first sketch for the Red House.²⁸ The drawing was made during a trip to France in 1858; Morris and friends were sailing down the Seine, young and full of enthusiasm. An inherited fortune allowed him to consider building his own house to become the home of his future family as he was about to get married.²⁹

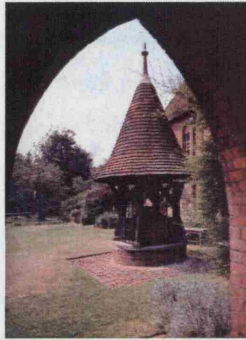
Despite the amount of careful planning and endless detailing, one would expect from Morris and Webb in this situation, they appear to have approached their project with straightforwardness and confidence. Drawings were made after they returned to England, the

²⁷ Wall, p. 182.

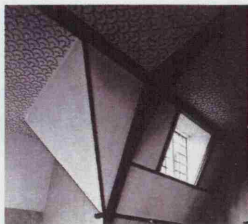
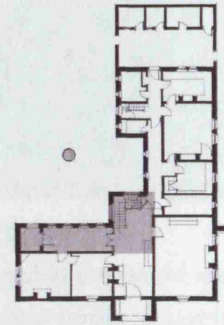
²⁸ W.R. Lethaby, *Philip Webb and His Work* (London: Raven Oak Press, 1979) p. 26.

²⁹ Morris married Jane Burden, who was a much favoured model in his circle of artist friends due to her significant beauty suitable for their pre-Raphaelite motifs. She later participated in the development of embroidery for Morris’ firm, Paul Thompson, *The Work of William Morris* (London: Heinemann, 1967) p. 109.

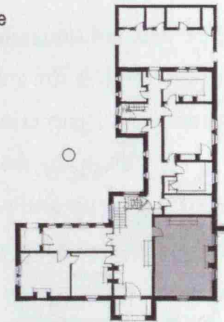
_015 Red House, *The Pilgrim's Rest*



Volume two



Volume three



_16/17/18 Red House, the roof scape in the study



_19/20 Red House, the oriel, exterior and interior

building of the house started the year after, and “at the end of the ‘wet’ summer of 1860”³⁰ the married couple moved in.

The passage from the entrance hall in the second volume leads to a grand door opening to the garden porch and entering Morris’ garden, with the well, is almost like stepping further inside the house than actually out of it. The garden porch, one passes through, becomes merely a passage than the sheltering space one would encounter arriving from the outside. Once in the garden one is drawn to the well. As the only source of water in Morris’ time, the well must have been a frequently visited and central spot, its purposefulness adding a somewhat pragmatic element to its otherwise highly symbolic presence.

On the first floor yet another passage leads to the significant space of Morris’ study, which has a fluctuating character equalling the well’s. With its curious arrangement of windows and crystal-like roof scape it is a space highly receptive to the movement of the sun, to darkness and light, it is where the house once again opens up to other dimensions, geometrically and spatially. Where Morris worked, a radiating place.

The third volume contains the dining room and the upstairs drawing room and their likenesses are apparent: places to meet, recreate, socialise, entertain – refuges into spaces of community, festivity, and creativity, social havens. One can only imagine the splendour of arts and crafts present in these rooms, real and planned for.

Morris and Webb chose a rather conventional one-room-one-purpose scheme in a pragmatic layout. One of their main concerns might have been the appropriate position of the drawing room and inspiration seems to have come from the architect William Butterfield’s *Alvechurch Refectory* built in 1855.³¹ They established a distinct northwest corner volume containing the living room and drawing room directly reminiscent of Butterfield’s scheme, Webb’s sketchbook from this period contains drawings of the older master’s buildings.³²

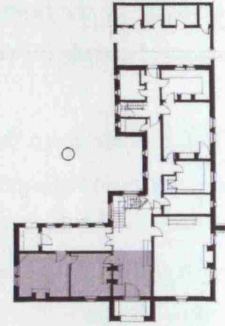
One above the other, a hierarchy prevails, and although both drawing room and dining room are spaces sparsely lit, as for natural light, the former has the significant feature of an oriel window facing the west garden with seats for long term occupation. In a very peculiar way the oriel is not just projected from the façade, it stands down on the ground outside with one foot, or is it more like a trunk? The difference is not insignificant as a chimney right next to it is moving in the opposite direction, upwards. The oriel is somehow resting on the ground allowing the neighbouring chimney with its purposeful incentive to blow to the sky. In this way the drawing room is anchored as well, quite visibly from the exterior and rather subtle and metaphorical, when experienced from the inside.

³⁰ Edward Hollamby, *Red House* (London: Longman Group, 1991)

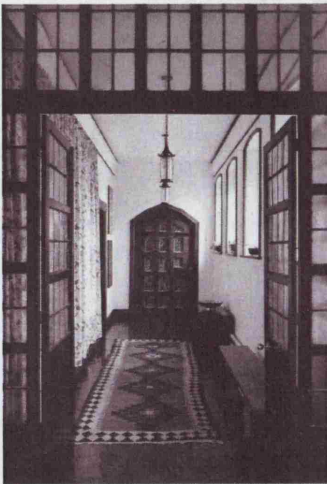
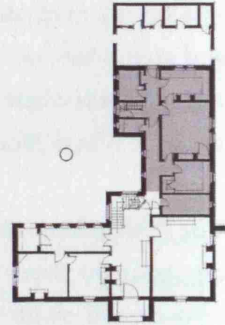
³⁰ Blundell-Jones have pointed to the striking similarity of plan and roof plan, p. 39.

³¹ Thompson, p. 13.

Volume four



Volume 5+6



_21/22 Red House, passage ways, downstairs and upstairs

The fourth volume keeps the previous three together and it does so in a compositional way rather than programmatically. It contains a variety of rooms of mostly private character although the waiting room, accessed from the hall, may be characterised as almost public. Was it the next step in the ritual of welcome to leave visitors to wait here before inviting them into the rest of the house, after they had already gone through the porch? Behind the waiting room is a bedroom and who would reside here? One suggestion is “bachelor visitors like Webb.”³³

Upstairs is the master bedroom on top of the hall followed by a dressing room and then again the study. As becomes clear these spaces are rather contained in this volume than making it up. They seem to be positioned along the north façade for their suitability to that direction more than anything else. As ‘night-spaces’ illuminated by the glow of dreams rather than daylight.

Due to a twist in the direction of the house rather than programmatic content, the fifth and sixth volumes register as two although they are one. Besides from the well court façade, which gives the impression of a distinction between the volume attached to the drawing room and the angled section rounding off the building, they both contain a range of rooms assigned to purposes related to food.

That the food-related program takes up so much space is worth noticing but two spacious bedrooms also occupy a significant part of the first floor. These might have been the childrens’ rooms, in which case the significant way one ‘jumps off’ the stairs, when walking up to reach this level slightly lower than the first floor, implies the hierarchy of the house tenants. Not to mention the staff, out of sight with bedrooms behind the childrens’ and their own staircase to reach the kitchen downstairs.

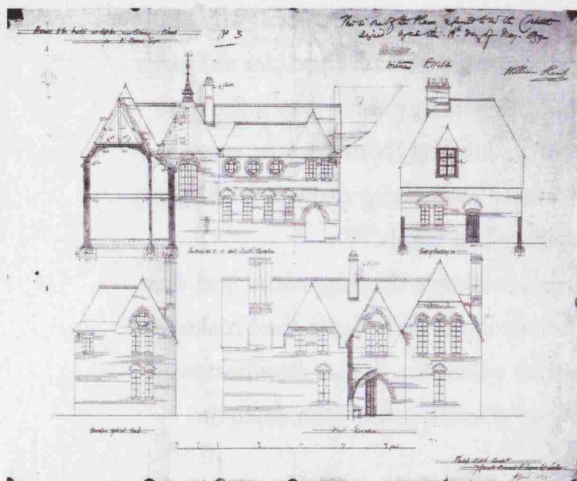
But why did Morris and Webb construct the Red House as an assemblage of volumes? Were they deliberately designating the programmatic content specific positions in relation to particularly convenient groupings? Or was it a desire to model an otherwise pragmatic and conventional plan drawing into surprising spatial constellations, which would also inform a complex exterior appearance? To what extent did they develop the scheme through sectional drawings, cutting through mass, ordering the massive?

A reference often cited is A. W. Pugin, who in his influential book *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* argued, “The two great rules for design are these: 1st, that there should be no features about a building which are not necessary for convenience, construction, or propriety; 2nd, that all ornament should consist of enrichment of the essential construction of the building.”³⁴

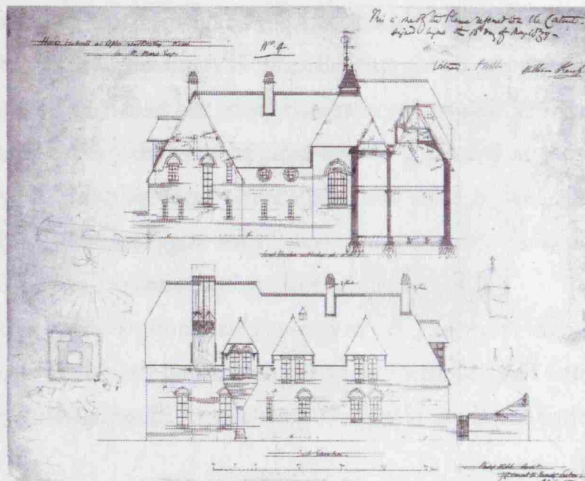
³² Blundell Jones, p. 43.

³³ A. W. Pugin, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture: Set Forth in Two Lectures Delivered at St. Marie’s, Oscott* (London: John Weale, 1841) p. 1.

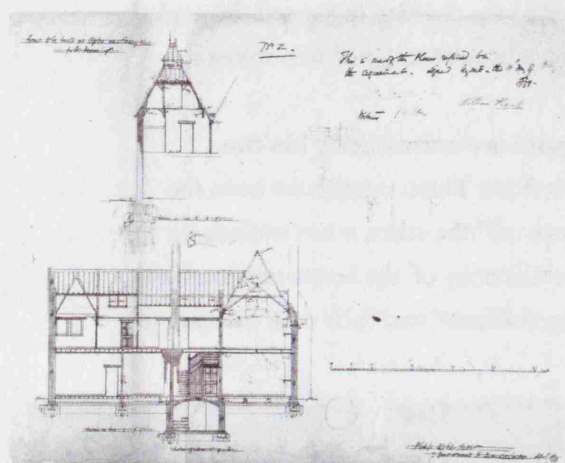
³⁴ “Experience-optics are one strategy that Matta-Clark developed to encourage an inventive questioning: with the complex movement they involved, working from visual to broader kinaesthetic and durational dimensions, some of his cinematic images interrogate the spectator’s straightforward relationship with ‘tactile physicality’, offering instead a process through which both matter and memory could be valorized and invigorated; matter as active rather than inert, and memory as individual and collective rather than just official history. Throughout his oeuvre, he sought to expand fields of human experience and to demonstrate that alongside systemized approaches to life, other modalities exist simultaneously. The vertigo brought about [...] illustrates the inventive possibilities opened up when experience exceeds that which can be thought,” in Stephen Walker, “Baffling Archaeology: The Strange Gravity of Gordon Matta-Clark’s Experience-optics,” *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 2 no. 2 (2003) p. 180.



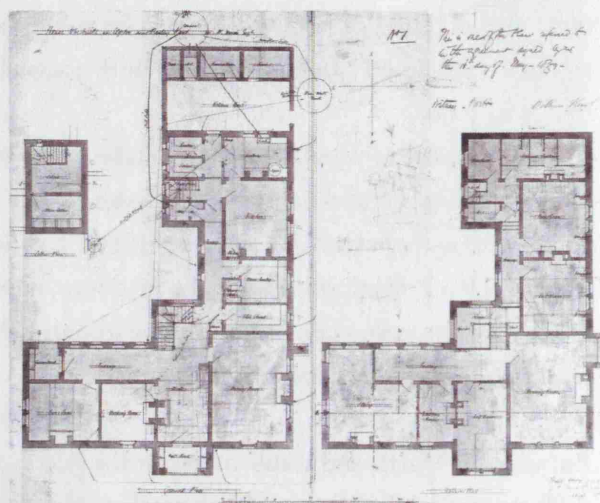
_23 Red House, north, east and south facades with section



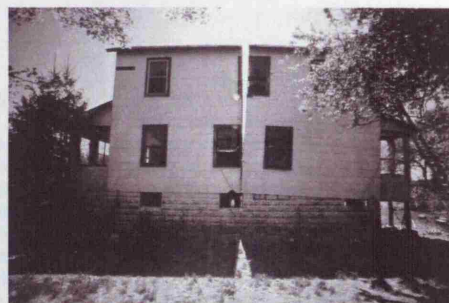
_24 Red House, east and west facades with section



_25 Red House, section through north wing



_26 Red House, ground floor and first floor plans



Red House does to some extent apply this idea of structural ‘transparency’ as the layout is mostly comprehensible. The preference for free fenestration, which appears to be determined by interior arrangements rather than pragmatic façade composition, continues the notion of primacy of part over the whole, which the volumetric structure brings forth. The variety of window shapes and types also gives an indication of what hides behind the walls, although they are not completely revealing.

The drawings for the Red House show an elaborate and thoughtful process detailing the range of unique features occurring throughout the building. A large degree of freedom resides in this and an overall alignment of parts is not particularly evident. Several sectional drawings combine section and elevation, as is natural considering the structure of the building but also show how the interior constantly is related to the exterior.

The sections tend to cut through more than one volume and depict them as coherent unities in a manner almost reductive of the emphasis otherwise shown in the exterior appearance of the house. It might reveal a counterforce to the otherwise fragmentary motive – to prevent the house from falling apart. And if it does not fall apart, if the volumetric structure hides a rather coherent domestic layout, then how to explain the otherwise singular nature of most spaces in the house? The porch, the staircase, the garden porch, the study, the drawing room with the oriel – they all claim a certain individuality within the shared frame. They have a double nature, they belong to the unity of one building, yet, they are portals to other dimensions, they lead out of the house. What keeps the house together?

AND DOUBLING

The abandoned home was filled by a sliver of sunlight that passed the day throughout the rooms.

The house has changed, there are almost two houses, or two half houses. Or one house divided in two parts, half as good or double as ordinary, which means nothing more than a little less material present than before. Inside, a gaze, my gaze, follows uncertain trajectories – lying down, bending over, hanging – I am split like the building, like the ‘I’ splits the sentence, or draws a line. The cutting is over, all over the home, keeping it together, like a string.

The image of the shadow of 322 Humphrey Street cleaved by a strip of light is recurring throughout the *Splitting* film. And it is a telling image suggesting the deeper implications of the cut. The shadow image as cast on the ground outside of the house implies an otherness somehow opaque and inaccessible, out of reach. The wholeness of the building is retained in one uniform figure, which cannot be approached.



27 *Splitting*, three chromatic prints mounted on board, 1974

The opening of the house by cutting through and the exposure to light does not invoke transparency but cast a negative image in the form of the shadow. The house exposed to light echoes darkness, one has to move inside to process the house anew. Matta-Clark starts by moving his eyes, the camera, following the strip of light shining through the cut. The dark interior catches light; he traces the contours of another house, moving from the two-dimensional plane of the cut to the three-dimensional interior space. Never losing sight of the golden line, space unfolds beyond reason and turns the suburban box house into a kaleidoscopic and irregular construct of an almost immaterial character.

Time is a crucial factor in the unfolding of this other house, Matta-Clark seeks to capture the kinaesthetic experience with his camera, as he moves around it becomes clear that he not only records the other house, he constructs it. The interior appears endless, almost otherworldly. The presence of the cut overwhelms the caricature of the house; its radicalism underscores the rigidity of the existing building. Through his camera eyes he reconstructs the house, he builds it through movement, he pulls together what he has pulled apart.³⁵

The doubling occurring as a result of the splitting of 322 Humphrey Street has several manifestations. At first sight there is the building now in two parts, although connected through the foundation, and its cleaved shadow in the grass. This, in itself double, representation is an exterior conception of the split and double theme, which captures it in one single phrase, as an image. Moving inside the building the experience of the split and double is necessarily all together different, this is where a more subtle development of an other house occurs beyond the clarity of the exterior image.

The other house, unfolded by Matta-Clark, is a new perception made possible through the 'new' architecture the cut offers. It does not appear as the recurrence of something long repressed and forgotten but rather the opposite, as a new beginning, a new life for the old house. In the sense of the *unheimlich*, the *heimlich*, as 'heimlich', meaning literally secret,³⁶ the new house incorporates the old, it is build upon the old foundation. By transgressing the limits of homeliness, as expressed through a 'whole house', the cleaved building incorporates the unhomely to such an extent that it takes on its disturbing energies and in a sense provides space for the unhomely by performing it.

Eventually in this part of the film, Matta-Clark frames the house at an angle from outside, it looks almost untouched by chainsaw or other, but it has lost its frontality.

³⁵ Freud reproduces the full entry on the word 'heimlich' from Sanders' *Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache* in "Das Unheimliche" ("The Uncanny") p. 344. The second section of the entry refers to the meaning "[c]oncealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know of or about it, withheld from others."

³⁶ Thompson describes how the interior of the Red House was not as such a reaction to High Victorian "gloom and clutter," being rather dark and furnished to "create an atmosphere of a miniature medieval palace," Thompson, p. 13-5. Yet, the idealism and design references were of a different order and almost every item brought into the house was designed either by Morris or his friends. Especially Webb was an active purveyor of furniture and tableware and the design activities led to the foundation of the firm, Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Company, in April 1861.

If the home is unhomely, is then the house not a house? And if the home is also a dream, is then the house more than a house? Is there something like just a house, with a home and a dream and the opposite, wherever it hides, inside?

If the industrialised society surrounding the Red House was going astray in exploitation of human labour and craze for profit, this was not exactly a dream world according to Morris, so he created his own, with house. Several schemes were developed for the work to be done in order to achieve this. One plan was to cover the interior with murals, frescoes, embroidery, paintings, and stained glass – had all the work been carried out, it would no doubt have been overwhelming.³⁷ Morris' excessive interior vision might be interpreted as the construction of an *other* to Webb's more pragmatic architecture, a dream world inside the real world. As it turns out though, this basic duality, intended to be reconciled in the realisation of the house, does not alone answer for the aspects of otherness concerning the Red House.

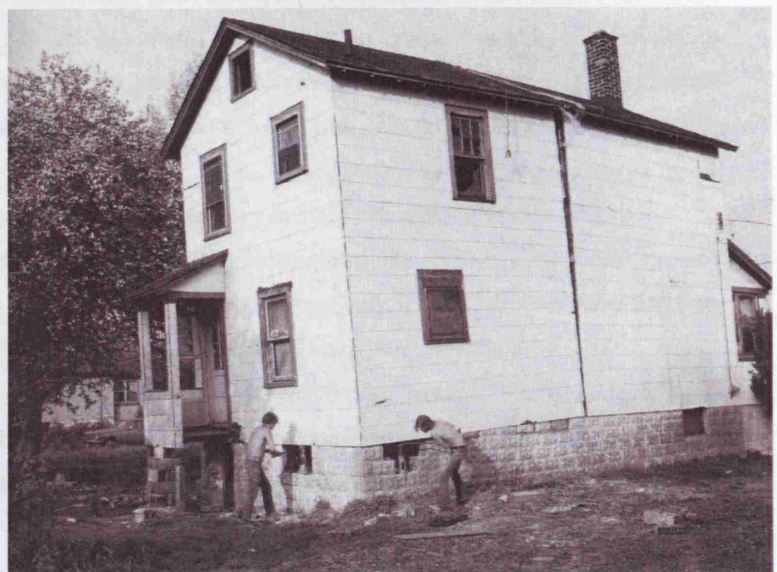
Taking the house apart along the lines of the six volumes reveals a building composed of six thematic units of differing hierarchical positions and orientations, where the volumetric structure of the building suggests it could not be contained harmoniously in one coherent form. Despite this division between sections of the house, and the overall distinction between rooms, through partition walls and naming of purposes, a certain amount of flexibility seems to prevail in the spacious and regular rooms. They could serve more than one purpose, and history might reveal they have, but more than anything else their articulation and interior qualities make them exquisitely suitable as keepers of secrets and dreams. Some might even inspire such homely activities. There is not a functional element present, which does not at the same time lend itself to several other interpretations, and there is not an artistic or decorative detail, which does not serve a purpose, be it ever so irrational.

*"The true has no windows. The true never looks out at the universe."*³⁸ The Red House is in a sense a windowless house, the interior being so concentrated that the world outside disappears and the exterior fades into darkness. Or becomes one with the garden. The garden is almost an interior element, a coating, not just because "apples literally fell in through the open windows,"³⁹ but the presence of this organic, though cultivated, natural life provides a protective layer to the house and as such appear as an integral part of Webb's and Morris' scheme. The Red House is an interior first and foremost. As a retreat it succeeds largely because it appears to be positioned outside the range of challenges, physically and conceptually.

³⁷ Georges Teyssot refers to Walter Benjamin in a distinction between intensity of interior space. What he labels "extremely intensified interiors" are interiors, which present dream qualities, a "dream architecture." Teyssot quotes notes made by Benjamin prior to his project on the Parisian arcades where he writes: "Arcades: houses, passages, that have no exterior side. Like the dream," in Georges Teyssot, "A Topology of Thresholds," *Home Cultures*, vol. 2 no. 1 (March 2005) p. 95.

³⁸ As the guide on a tour of Red House, the 5th of May 2006, expressed it.

³⁹ Anne M. Wagner has written: "It became more decisively visible as a split only when the rear portion of the building was deconstructed further: the foundation was undermined, a cinder-block course partly subtracted, its remainder beveled away at a downward-sloping angle, and the whole rear half of the structure then tilted backward until it found a solid repose. Architecturally the moment is a mini-apocalypse, though as filmed it looks distinctly like work: the footage shot outside the house pays closest attention to the artist's equipment and bodily labor: in this sequence he appears without his shirt," in "Splitting and Doubling: Gordon Matta-Clark and the Body of Sculpture," *Grey Room*, vol. 1 no. 14 (Winter 2004) p. 36.



_28 Gordon Matta-Clark and Manfred Hecht bevelling down the rear part of 322 Humphrey Street

On a larger scale the cancellation of the surrounding world appears to disturb the balance of the house. It is almost too perfect, a beautiful, highly elaborated building, and interior, providing the framework for an ideal family and its activities. A retreat, intentionally and as a result, but set somehow in between the reality of the world and the escape from it. In a sense the Red House was too close to London and too far away at the same time, the radicalism of Morris' pursuit, in both regards, was either too modest, or just double. He wanted both, the possibilities of the city and the dwelling in the countryside, maybe it was a contradiction impossible to solve building the perfect home.

SPLIT DEFINITIVE

Bevelling down forty linear feet of masonry, 322 Humphrey St. was gently tipped back on its foundation.

Cutting horizontally challenges gravitational laws, cutting the foundation defies all sense, half a house hangs in the air, then sits back without a sound.

Which way to go? There is no longer only one. Green leaves slowly move in the wind outside. And so I become one, and leave.

Matta-Clark emphasizes the irreversibility of the cut by performing yet another operation on the house. His gesture is one of tilting the rear half down on the foundation, which has been modified to produce a slight angle. Thereby the cleavage gets manifested visibly, as seen from the exterior, and not least physically, as experienced from the inside. The operation is slightly hazardous, will the house obey?⁴⁰ Then in one elegant movement the rear part sits down on the foundation.⁴¹

The suspense of the sequence is significant, Matta-Clark frames the whole of the building with his camera, now more a complex of parts than one singular entity, and adds a bit of handheld shivering to produce some tension to the in reality quite tense situation. Can the image contain the split house or will the tilted half slip off its foundation and crash outside the framing? Something inside seems to be keeping the house together, preventing this from happening, something still out of sight.

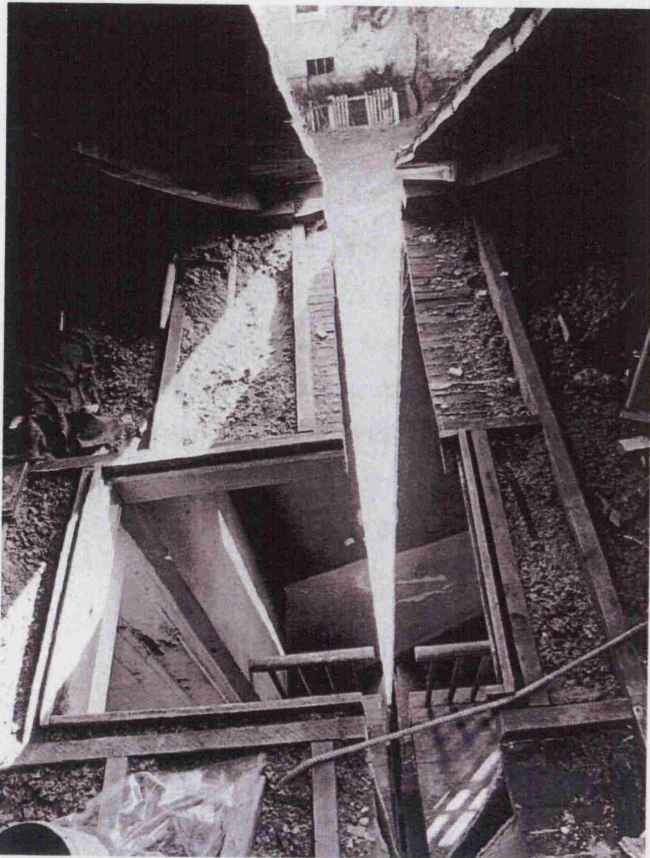
A woman then appears on the first floor; she proceeds down the stairs, jumps over the gap as she encounters it, eventually leaves the picture, maybe the house, now free to go? The

⁴⁰"She came down like a dream... [...] it was like a perfect dance partner. I can't wait to do it again," Liza Bear interview, p. 168.

⁴¹ In the interview with Liza Bear, Matta-Clark distances himself from the references people tend to draw from *Splitting*, arguing that it is "all about a direct, immediate activity, and not about making associations with anything outside it," p. 166.



_29 Splitting, Four Corners, 1974



_30 Splitting, 1974

symbolism of her appearance is noteworthy although Matta-Clark himself did not seem too keen on such interpretations himself, or he left it to the interpretation of the spectator.⁴²

The last part of the film shows the cutting out of one of the upper corners of the building under the roof, all four corners were removed and subsequently exhibited in galleries. This further modification becomes in a sense a project in its own right but nevertheless, as it is included in the film, must be connected somehow to the splitting of the house. As if one must find a way to leave, yet a new way, to have rightfully passed through.

Making the split definitive and discovering a woman inside implies the cut has given access to another dimension of the house, and not least the home it was meant to be. Walking down the stairs she is jumping the gap, trespassing the section drawn by Matta-Clark's body. She is able to transcend the two-dimensionality of the section, not only by adding the third dimension, but through her repeated weaving and bodily negotiation with the gap. Then she hesitates a moment and disappears.

Her sudden presence in the film, as the one testing out the new house, and potential home, can be interpreted as a gesture towards her as central in the household. Since Matta-Clark appeared reluctant to ever come up with such explanations, his reason for introducing someone else in the house seems to be to detach the viewer from identification with the space. As if the first step towards leaving the house again is finding someone else in there, presumably preoccupied with her own being rather than anyone else's.

Very few actually managed to go to the house during the short period of time it was there, split. Those who did have countered for their experience in various ways:

"Starting at the bottom of the stairs where the crack was small, you'd go up, and as you'd go further up you'd have to keep crossing the crack. It kept widening up as you made your way up the stairs to the top, where the crack was one or two feet wide. You really had to jump it. You sensed the abyss in a kinaesthetic and psychological way."⁴³

"After it had been cut I felt nervous being in the house, I thought it would collapse any minute. I really didn't enjoy being in it, though I loved the way it looked from the outside, and liked standing back and looking at it."⁴⁴

"Gordon's work... needed, in fact, to be inhabited, needed to be populated, to be lived in, walked through, experienced and not just seen or understood."⁴⁵

Some of the memories are marked by a certain feeling of unease, if not straight out fear of falling down, and an overall sensation of having transcended a significant threshold. A house

⁴² Alice Aycock in conversation with Joan Simon in Mary Jane Jacob, *Gordon Matta-Clark: A Retrospective* (Chicago, Museum of Contemporary Art, 1985) p. 33.

⁴³ Horace Solomon in Jacob, p. 374.

⁴⁴ Richard Nonas in *Gordon Matta-Clark* (IVAM Centre Julio Gonzales, 1993) p. 399.

⁴⁵ Blundell-Jones writes about the location of the well: "Although not immediately apparent to visitor or reader of the isolated plan, Red House is powerfully concentric in concept. The site stood in relatively open landscape, the house in turn right at the middle of its orchard, enclosing between its wings a court centred on the well, elemental focus to the whole," p. 43.



_31 Splitting, Four Corners, 1974

unstable, literally, but nevertheless, inhabitable, a house alive? Brought back to life, breathing, talking, demanding? A structure, not simply a frame.

The cutting and removal of one corner allows the viewer to escape. It is the eye and mind wandering out and into the light outside, the body remaining inside, forever trapped in the house, or the memory of the house. If it was not possible to escape in one jump at least the camera could zoom in and take us out.

The Red House is a split house and always was. Half a house intended to become two homes, eventually, with the addition of yet another. A whole house with two homes, two houses one home, either way or both ways, or neither way, as it was not built and never will be.

The L-shaped plan of the half house that was built, still invites completion in order to perform a circumscription of the internal quadrangle with the circular well placed centrally, if not in the centre.⁴⁶ Had the Burne-Jones wing been built, the split between the house and its surroundings would have been even more profound. That is, the negation of the neighbouring surroundings, as the distant city out of sight could only be truly shut out once it was no longer remembered.

As Morris lost a significant amount of money due to a business decline in the copper mining industry from where his inherited fortune came, he had to restructure things. The possibility of establishing the firm on the premises, and install the Burne-Jones family as well, was a desirable solution, which would also have proved a significant choice, reuniting home and work.⁴⁷

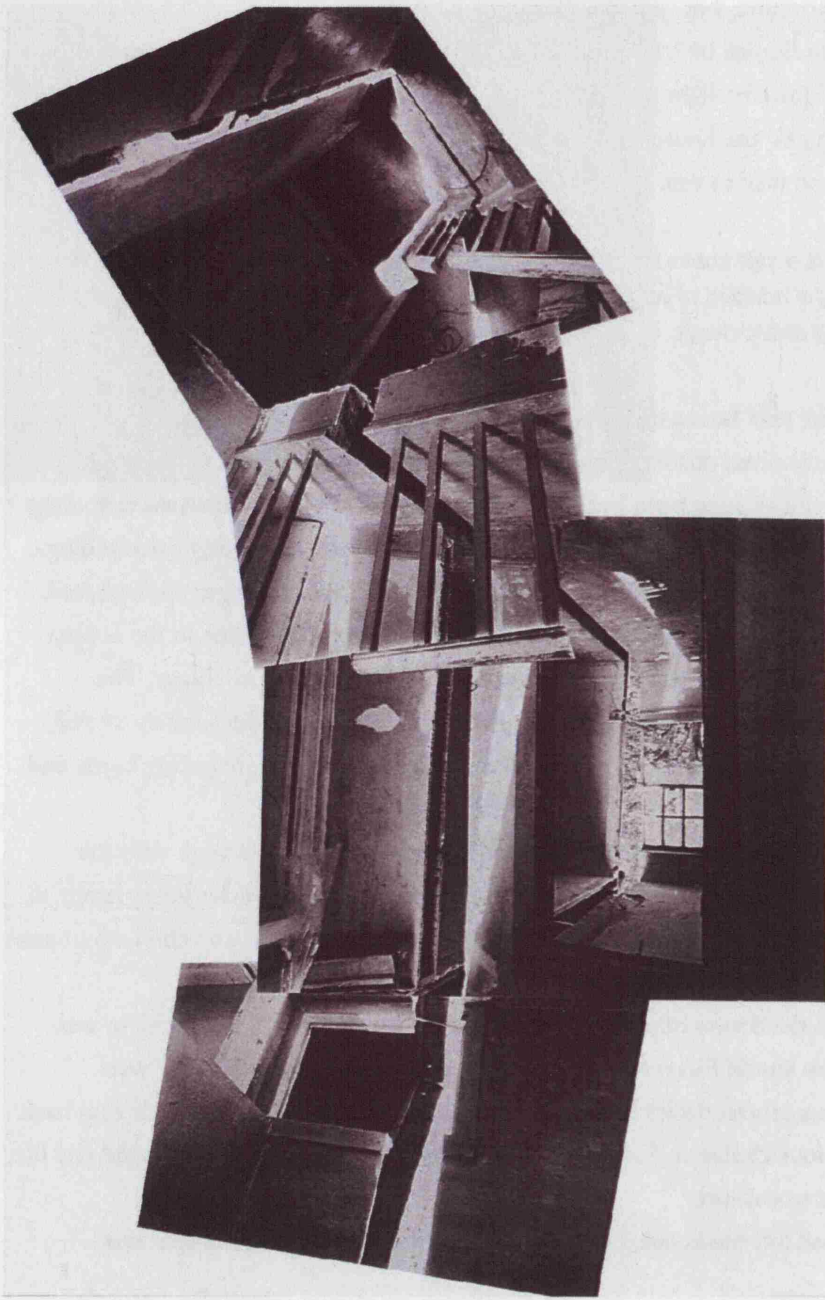
If these were the more pragmatic reasons behind the plans to go through with the extension to the house, it was rather sad circumstances, which forced the Burne-Jones family to eventually cancel them as Georgiana Burne-Jones' caught scarlet fever and lost a child. Her health was weak after that and the remote location of the house made them withdraw.

The splitting of the dream house, the *Palace of Art*, occurring with this decision, was definitive, the Red House would forever be half a house. Morris' financial problems were unresolved and to make a crucial decision was unavoidable. Leaving the house and moving back to London was the obvious choice and so after all it was the distance between house and city life, which forced the dream to collapse.

Once Morris had left the house, he could not return and never did, the split was definitive.

⁴⁶ Walter Benjamin has described how the separation of home and work was a significant occurrence in the nineteenth century, invoking the concept of the private individual. "Under the reign of Louis Philippe, the private individual makes his entry into history. For the private individual, places of dwelling are for the first time opposed to places of work. The former come to constitute the interior. [...] the private individual, who in the office has to deal with realities, needs the domestic interior to sustain him in his illusions. [...] from this derives the phantasmagorias of the interior – which, for the private individual, represents the universe. In the interior, he brings together remote locales and memories of the past. His living room is a box in the theatre of the world," in Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Belknap Press, 2002) p. 19.

⁴⁷ "[M]ost people, including many accomplished art/architecture critics, are not even aware that a new architecture has been among us for the last decade – an architecture which has just rendered culturally obsolete European-derived Modernist architecture as effectively as did that architecture once render obsolete the older beaux-arts tradition," in Wall, p. 181.



_32 *Splitting*, photographic collage, 1974

The finished work lasted three months before being demolished for urban "renewal".

322 Humphrey Street was not a building intended for the future. It was not much more than a temporary construction made by simple materials in the first place. As Matta-Clark approached the house with his chainsaw it was destined to be torn down and, despite his efforts to revitalize the structure, was eventually reversed to a state of unbuilt. Matta-Clark approached a doomed building but *his* version of unbuilding initiated more promise for the house, and architecture as such, than the eventual demolition and reprogramming of the area could provide. Before it was forever gone the house became a model for a future architecture.⁴⁸

As there would not remain a physical structure to exemplify Matta-Clark's architectural vision other means had to carry the message. His documentation of house, process, and progress through photography and film footage not only recorded the event but also became the media in which the restructuring of the house, and architecture, eventually took place. The image became the site due to the demolition of the house, that there actually *was* a house is significant for the authenticity of Matta-Clark's photographic work and the comment he came to make on modern architecture.⁴⁹

Occupying the actual split house, unbuilt according to Matta-Clark rather than bulldozers, he discloses its otherness through movement of body and eyes and captured this experience with the film camera. The film version describes the rather pragmatic process of cutting through the house from the initial search for a way to enter, through the actual cutting and the presence of the split house, until finally leaving it behind. Entwined in this narrative is a parallel and more poetically told story of the encounter with the *other* house becoming visible, present, when light enters through the gap. It is this redrawing, which occurs as one moves around the split illuminated house, that Matta-Clark strives to reconstruct in moving images as well as his photo collages, not as pure representation rather to recreate the experience through montage.

He made several photo collages based on merely documentary photographs, each performing a tour of the split house. A kinaesthetic experience achieved through the assembly of photographs into coherent, yet turbulent spatial constructions unsettling the viewer's sense of orientation and gravity. It is not possible to grasp the collage in one glance, its juxtapositions

⁴⁸ In a talk at the Serpentine Pavilion, London, the 18th of August 2006, Beatriz Colomina described how the architects of the Modern Movement initially presented their ideas through imagery because the technology of the day was not yet ready to construct it physically. Several icon buildings of the twentieth century were never actually built, but gained a status as such through their distribution via printed media. The difference between the split house and these mediated buildings is that it was *there* and the reconstruction through imagery was reconstructions of that, which took place.

⁴⁹ Christian Kravagna has written: "With the multiple perspectives of the photo collages, impossible to read in a single glance, Matta-Clark succeeds in drawing the viewer into the pictorial space, setting in motion different processes of orientation. Even if the real experience of the visitor cannot be represented, it is possible to produce an equivalent sense of the dynamic processes of physical and temporal perception." Christian Kravagna, "It's Nothing Worth Documenting If It's Not Difficult to Get": On the Documentary Nature of Photography and Film in the Work of Gordon Matta-Clark," in *Diserens*, p. 134.

and coherences must be explored through movement, of the eyes, but the impact of what is experienced goes beyond what it seen.⁵⁰ This reconstruction of the event through the photographic medium is analogue to the explorations of the *other* house, which Matta-Clark performs in his film.

That he is performing more than an autopsy becomes clear as the house unfolds into new configurations, revealing new spatial qualities. What evolves from the house, once cut open, is the potential of architectural elements like walls, floors and staircases influenced by light and shadow, rather basic measures, to speak about past, present, and future, memories and lost objects. Not just speak about, but enter a dialogue with the current building, now cleaved. Matta-Clark awakes the sleeping house and confronting it with its hidden potential he sets it free, as such it is a rebirth of 322 Humphrey Street, in the last minute before it is gone forever.

The merging of the split house and its *other* enforces a closer examination of the nature of the latter. What appears as a revelation as presented in film and collages is rather a construction, although of a kind which could not have been precipitated by Matta-Clark as such. The desire to approach buildings, and one could say architecture, by cutting through their constituent parts might rely on merely curiosity, "*It seemed to take cutting through it with a chain saw to get to know It*,"⁵¹ but it reveals a part of his strategy, which appears to rely on a large degree of empathy with the chosen object. Even if his motivation is mainly driven by an ambition to "get to know it," he still must decide how to perform the cutting.

When Matta-Clark is reluctant to get into a discussion about psychological implications and aspects of his work it might be due to the degree of self-analysis inherent. Nevertheless, it is difficult not to get psychoanalytical associations confronted by a project like *Splitting*, the title referring directly to concepts of the split mind. If the *other* house is not exactly a recurrence from a 322 Humphrey Street house unconscious, it might be interpreted as a projection by Matta-Clark.⁵² Constructing it as he goes along, having firmly prepared the foundation, he projects a house. In this respect Matta-Clark's project is a live scale drawing interacting with the existing building, and how is that after all different from any other architectural projection?⁵³

A house with two centres, two anchor points of reference and reverence, this is how the Red House was built, and survives. Abandoned by one it became one for the other and another place for the one who left. A memory, a convoluted dream to always carry around but never return to.

⁵⁰ Liza Bear interview, p. 168.

⁵¹ Belonging to the theory of projection is the concept of Introjection, which implies that the subject "in fantasy, takes objects and their qualities from the 'outside' and places them 'inside'," as described by Steve Pile in *The Body and the City: Psychoanalysis, Space and Subjectivity* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996) p. 103. Matta-Clark's negotiation with 322 Humphrey Street can be seen as taking place through the double movement of projection and introjection as an ongoing dialogue with the house.

⁵² Matta-Clark explains: "Perhaps the physicality is the easiest reading of the work. The first thing one notices is that violence has been done. Then the violence turns to visual order and hopefully, then to a sense of heightened awareness. You see that light enters places it otherwise couldn't. Angles and depths can be perceived where they should have been hidden. Spaces are available to move through that were previously inaccessible. My hope is that the dynamism of the action can be seen as an alternative vocabulary with which to question the static inert building environment," in "Interview with Gordon Matta-Clark, Antwerp, September 1977," pp. 189-90.

⁵³ Oliver Garnett, *The Red House* (London: The National Trust, 2003) p. 12.

The Red House was a home for more than one hundred years before becoming the museum that now showcases the framework for the first home, *his* home. It is more than a memory, a memorial, a monument, it is a house. And a dream house, its architecture as vital as ever, the home most people dream of, still. It might even be too avantgardistic, but as long as the photograph of the entrance hall is on display it might go down just well. And it does not really matter, which one of the two photographs, even the one to be taken in 2044, might look just the same.

Inhabiting an image of a home, is not that what we always do, since every home starts with a drawing, a projection? Someone always 'lived' in our home before we arrived, maybe even an architect. To imagine a home, and conceive it, then built it, that is what they did, Webb and Morris. They could have chosen so many different ways but they chose to do it the Red House way. They might not have had an image in front of them but they had a dream, a myth, or a preference for past times, they even considered these capable of suggesting a future.

Leaving the house behind was the least desirable option for Morris it seems, as he never returned to the Red House afterwards. He went to live in London on his business premises and so eventually managed to combine home and work against the trend of his time but in accordance with his medieval inspiration. Later on Morris and family moved to Kelmscott Manor after staying in a house in Hammersmith, and he kept his home and work in close proximity throughout.⁵⁴

The nineteenth century was the era of home making in a way, which has haunted the western world ever since. The notion of what was homely developed into an image to be distributed through printed media, an image to invoke the homemaker's desire for the perfect home.⁵⁵ To be a good citizen became intimately bound up with being a good consumer. A circumstance, which also Morris and his firm profited from as purveyors of material goods for interiorising the private space, the home.

This is a paradoxical intersection, which marks Morris' oeuvre, as a socialist and businessman. It suggests that his idealism was never really reconciled with his social awareness and concerns. As his customers were limited to those who could pay, the Red House community was an exclusive group of people, friends, and not as such an open structure.

Had Morris' ambition had a wider scope from the outset, he might not only have created a *Palace of Art* for his own use but initiated the foundation of a more inclusive community in the spirit of the garden cities later to develop. As he became an agitate and vigorous socialist activist, who devoted a significant amount of time and economical resources to political work, his viewpoints were distributed widely and eventually came to have a profound influence on the garden cities.⁵⁶

The movement from being profoundly inspired by medievalism to becoming a politically aware nineteenth century socialist reveals Morris' readiness for change. His ambitions in both

⁵⁴ Charles Rice has elaborated how paintings of private interiors came into circulation and enforced the obsession with decoration and furnishing in the nineteenth century. "The realisation of a domesticity wherein images interact with a spatial context came about through the historical emergence of the bourgeois domestic interior at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The very context for a bourgeois sense of domesticity emerges as a doubled interior, an interior that is consciously understood as both an image and a spatial condition." In "Rethinking Histories of the Interior", *The Journal of Architecture*, vol. 9 no. 3 (Autumn 2004) p. 1.

⁵⁵ Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-Morrow* (London: Faber and Faber, 1946)

respects are entwined in the Red House and its construction might be interpreted as a turning point for his own understanding of his vision. Morris was only 25 years old, when the house was built, and the confidence he must have gained from carrying out such an ambitious project can only have convinced him of his own potential. Out of the work grew the idea about the firm, which was established and continued production throughout Morris' life, it seems he found the medium to contain his creations, the area in which he could exercise his ideas, the counterforce to emancipate the concept of dwelling, the house.

EPILOGUE

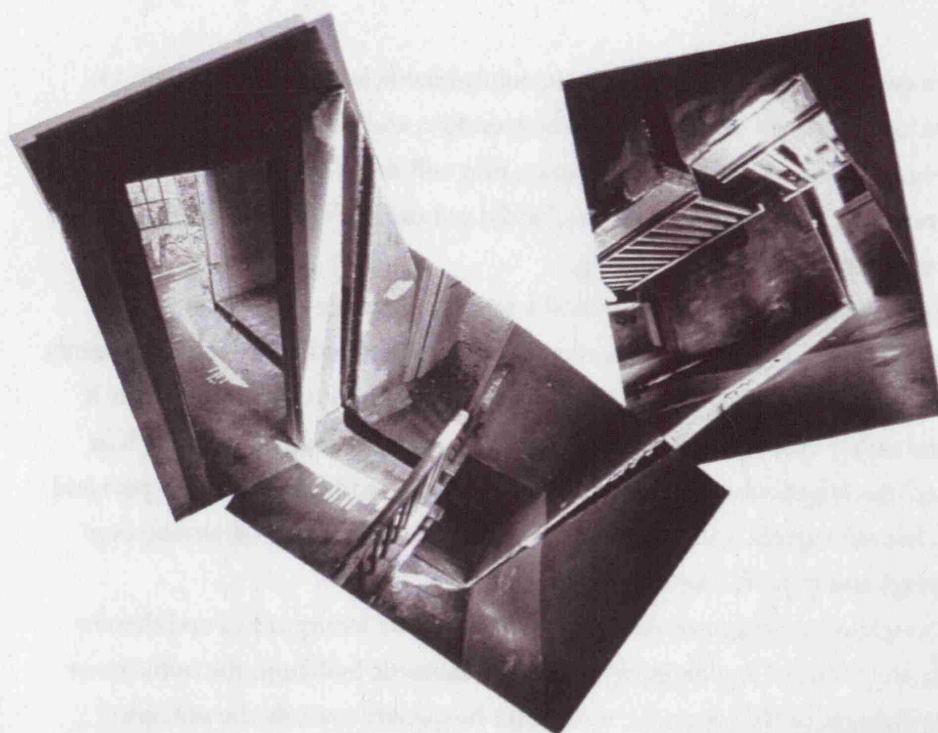
Gordon Matta-Clark's cuts introduced elements of the uninhabitable into building structures, they were provocative interrogations of architectural conventions and challenged our profoundest beliefs regarding orientation and occupancy, they still do. When he cut an abandoned home in two pieces across its middle line, he did not only split the building, it seems he cut right through our whole concept of dwelling.

The *Splitting* project was, and is, a most radical attempt to unsettle everything we ever thought a home was about, the dream image we carry around and are confronted with constantly. It works like an anatomical intersection of the human body to see what it contains and how it might be working. And rather than sewing the dead body together again or just dumping it in the pile of 'case closed' investigations, he leaves it open to let us see and experience the pain and tragedy of the death, but subsequently also to realise the possibilities of living on among ever present proof of damage and imperfection.

Matta-Clark's architecture suggests these 'negatives' must be incorporated and thereby confronted in the physical fabric of buildings, and not least domestic buildings, the home must integrate the *other*, the stranger or the strange, it must offer hospitality towards the unknown. That is a prerogative of our modern condition.

Did the Red House integrate this otherness? Was it precipitating a future, not yet fully outlined, by providing shelter for the modern unhomely? Did it incorporate its own decline as a home in an unconcealed way? It did in the sense its remote location and the lack of dialogue between the house in the countryside and the city is obvious to eye and mind, but it also did something else, which responds to all three questions, though the effect of what was produced can hardly have been foreseen by Morris and Webb.

The Red House is not picture-perfect, which is revealed when one tries to capture it photographically, seeking to capture its oneness, its wholeness. Curiously, one might very well have to montage several images to represent the dynamic effect of its aggregate massing, as experienced externally. A similar situation arises in the interior, one can only frame details, one by one, or corners cut out of their context. The Red House is 'alive', it resists being framed in its



_33 *Splitting*, photographic collage, 1974



_34 Red House, staircase pointing to the sky

totality, it wrestles and twists and turns, and is best glimpsed over an angle, otherwise it is rather flat and reduced compared to its actual presence.

The way this phenomenon responds to the question of the unhomely brings back the photographs of the entrance hall because it explains why they appeared to be unsettled. As if what was intended as images of 'the home of all homes', proto-modern, authentic, and elaborate, showed a hall strangely flat and slightly distorted, something not quite in accordance with the concept of the homely.

This appearance of the uncanny suggests the images work as transmitters of an uncanny presence through the photographic medium, that the uncanny becomes visible through the photographic framing. It also relies on the viewer's projection due to a certain readiness to respond once confronted with a homely interior reduced to an image. Confronted with something as familiar as the home, represented in not just one but two almost identical photographs, trying to capture a lively and dynamic space per se as an idealised moment, one cannot resist but feel an uncanny presence. Something very familiar has been reduced to an image, something we can never inhabit. Is that how we have come to dwell in the twenty first century, through and in dream images?

The Red House is a dream house, not an image of one. It shelters this 'other-homely', which is the ability to dream, to keep secrets and hide, what cannot be exposed to light, the private and personal that constitutes a home. Yet, it also challenges preconceptions. The staircase with its pitched roof, the study, the oriel window, the stained glass and paintings, the Red House takes one beyond the everyday. Its *other* is to a great extent its readiness to transport the inhabitant out of the house, to stimulate adventure. In a sense the Red House itself is the house of dreams, the home of dreams, a dream house where you might dream of something else than houses or homes. It shelters an active dreaming rather than a nostalgic dreaming, and if it reminds us of something it is to secure this possibility in our future homes.

One photo collage of Gordon Matta-Clark's split house makes me think of Red House and an image of the staircase. The tension is striking, the framing is almost violent, it is an extreme portrait of an interior space. On the contrary Matta-Clark's portrait of the 322 Humphrey Street staircase unfolds the movement of the cut through several spaces, it tears the house apart, when the images no longer match, it is no less expressive than the Red House image but it allows the viewer to experience the movement gradually, which means to experience it at all.

The framing of the Red House staircase in comparison nearly crushes the space in one attempt, and had the portrait been more generous towards the dynamic of the interior it would have been an altogether different experience, then comparison with 322 Humphrey Street would not have been relevant or maybe even possible. It would have been two houses, two homes, one and the other, here and there. The singular, idealised image of the home turns it into an *other*, something to compare with, but not to live in.

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